

Country of the Week: Equatorial Guinea

A message from U.S. Ambassador to Equatorial Guinea, Julie Furuta-Toy, to YALI Network Members:

Since serving as the U.S. Ambassador to Equatorial Guinea, I have had the privilege of observing the diversity of accomplishments by YALI Network members. Despite numerous challenges and limited resources, your activities have made a lasting, positive impact in your communities.

Examples of these great achievements include Lucas Escalada's Ideal Woman projects; Cristian Eteo's work with Locos por Cultura, inspiring artists from all over the country; Sese Site's contributions to Barbarrio, providing motivational workshops for young Equatoguineans; Valerio Thompson's Girl Child Empowerment Initiative, inspiring women and girls.


U.S. Embassy Malabo will continue to create partnerships with YALI Network members and alumni to reach Mission objectives, including human trafficking, expanding educational opportunities, and women's empowerment. I encourage you to remain active in this growing network whether this is your first day joining us or you have been with us for many years.

Continue the good work you are doing and do not be afraid to dream big! Equatorial Guinea depends on you, yes you.

Julie Furuta-Toy

U.S. Ambassador to Equatorial Guinea

Motivating at-risk youth

A screenshot from Sese Site's documentary, which features youth from #CountryoftheWeek  Equatorial Guinea.

Since returning to Equatorial Guinea after participating in the [Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders](#) in 2015, YALI Network member and volunteer Sese Site has been using her experiences to teach at-risk youth and provide them the skills, education, and networks they need to succeed.

For the last two years, she has organized motivational seminars for at-risk youth in partnership with the US Embassy in Malabo. In these seminars, participants develop skills and gain knowledge about a range of topics, including leadership, diversity, project management, and more. "I use [YALI \[Network\] Online Course](#) materials to deliver information on leadership, project management, and empowering young women," says Sese. "Many young leaders who attended this youth seminar have started or improved their own projects, and some of them have turned their projects into job opportunities."

Sese has also worked with several NGOs, YALI Network members, and UNICEF to create a documentary about her project, which has been broadcast on national television. "The documentary follows 45 participants, ages 16 to 26, as they spend 5 days together learning about project management, diversity, leadership, and even capoeira, a street dance workout," Sese explains.


For her latest project, Sese invited the film-maker and executive producer of 'Raise Up: The World

is Our Gym\'' to film street dance groups in Malabo. The film went on to win Best Documentary on Urban Culture at the 2016 NYC Hip-Hop Festival. "I am using street culture to work with kids at risk of social exclusion and provide them with education, employment opportunities, and decent accommodation," she says.

Sese also filmed a national television commercial alongside fellow YALI Network members to inform people about the YALI Network initiative and the Mandela Washington Fellowship. "Now, more Equatorial Guinea YALI [Network] members have joined this initiative and share their experiences on TV nationwide," she says. "My colleagues and I have appeared on television and radio programs several times to talk about [the YALI Network], so more people can be informed and have access to this great opportunity."

Promoting free speech, expression, and human rights awareness

Our next featured YALI Network member, Cristian Eteo Botau, is co-founder of a nation-wide, youth-led initiative that aims to promote free speech, expression, and human rights awareness through art in Equatorial Guinea.

A member of Locos Por Cultura delivers  a monologue about the importance of conservation and environmental protection at an Earth Day celebration in Malabo.

In 2015, Cristian helped form [Locos Por Cultura \(LPC\)](#)—which translates to "Crazy for Culture"—a community network of more than 500 young artists in Equatorial Guinea's two main cities, Malabo and Bata, as well as in the remote island Annobón. "The LPC network is made up of writers, theatre actors, cartoonists, painters, photographers, singers, hip-hop artists, and even computer programmers and web designers," explains Cristian. "They use their art as a communication tool to promote civic engagement, freedom of expression, and discuss human rights in a country where talking about those topics could lead to jail."

To involve youth from marginalized communities, LPC organizes events that encourage participation in civic life. LPC has already organized more than 50 community activities this year, including debates at secondary and high schools on leadership, poetry slams and reading evenings for young writers, theatre competitions, and communication and storytelling workshops.

Cristian believes that teaching the next generation through artistic expression could inspire change in Equatorial Guinea: "Our country is intentionally known for its oil reserves, but also for its poor human rights records, as well as high levels of corruption. Activism and advocacy on social issues like human rights, civic participation, and political transparency are severely repressed," he says. "For LPC, art in all its forms becomes an avenue for this young generation to talk about their frustrations and their hopes."

Encouragement through sports and mentorship

YALI Network volunteer Hector Nguema has worked with other YALI Network members to create a non-profit soccer academy, Futuras Esperanzas, that encourages low-income children to stay in school through sports and mentorship. "In my country, school absence is a big social problem, so

we're working to ensure that children are regularly attending school and continuing to develop," says Hector.

Futuras Esperanza is yet another example of a YALI Network member working to bring change to Equatorial Guinea through civic engagement. And his efforts have been met with a warm response. Says Hector, "It's remarkable to receive support from both families and the community."

The first championship game of Futuras Esperanzas soccer academy.